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The Doctrine of ASSURANCE: 2

O R,

The Case of a weak and doubting Conscience.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED at

St. LAWRENCE JEWRY,

IN THE

CITY of L O N D O N,

O N

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13, 1738.

W I T H

An APPENDIX, answering the OB-
JECTIONS from Texts of Scripture.

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ROMANS xiv. 1.

*Him that is weak in the faith receive you;
but not to doubtful disputations.*

IN the Christian Church there are several Degrees of Believers. Some are strong and some are weak; some few may have a full Assurance of their Salvation, and many others may be full of Doubtings, and yet they may all be true Members. Now St. Paul in the Text gives us a Direction, how they, who have arrived to the greatest Perfection, ought to behave themselves towards others, who are of an inferior Sort. They should receive them, and look upon them as in a State of Grace, and Heirs with others of the same Promises. And, indeed, he is so full hereof, that he treats of nothing else in this, and also in the following Chapter as far as the fifteenth Verse. So that all this may serve, to him who will diligently read it, as a Sermon upon the Words of the Text. Thus he enlarges at the Beginning of the next Chapter. *We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification, to build him up and comfort him in the Faith, and not to cast Doubts and Scruples in his Way. And for this Purpose he gives us an excellent Example. For even Christ pleased not himself. He did not boast of his own Perfections. But as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me. They who condemned others as not in a State of Grace, did in Effect condemn Christ himself. And, inasmuch as they do it to one of the least of his Brethren, they in Effect do it unto him. Because they act contrary to his Example, whose Character it was, that he should not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. And who invites all those, that labour and are heavy laden, to come unto him, and promises, that he would*

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• Matt. xii. 20.

• Matt. xi. 28.

would give them rest. If they who think themselves in a higher State, shall undertake to censure others, as in a State of Damnation, St. Paul tells us the Consequence, 1 Cor. viii. 11. *Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died.* And then he adds in the next Verse, *But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ.* How cautious then should we be, not to give the least Offence to the meanest Christian? And what Reason have we to practise the Advice of the Apostle in the Words of the Text? *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye; but not to doubtful disputations.*

By one who is *weak in the faith*, is meant a Christian who is full of Doubts and Fears, and hath not any Assurance, that he is in a State of Grace, or shall hereafter be an Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. And by *receiving* of such a Man is meant, to own him as a true Christian, and that he may be what he desires to be, though he is not yet assured of it, and so to comfort and encourage him, and avoid all *doubtful Disputations*. By which is meant all Disputations upon controverted Points, and especially such as may tend to increase his Doubts and Scruples, and make him more full of Fears than he was before. Or, as it is in the Margin of our Bibles, not to judge his doubtful Thoughts, or censure him as an Hypocrite or a Cast-away, or in a State of Damnation; because he is not so good as he wishes he was, or hath not arrived to such a State of Perfection, as may seem to be in some others.

The Words of the Text divide themselves into two Parts, which I intend by God's Permission to make the Subject of the following Discourse. The first is, *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye.*

From whence we may observe,

That a Man may be a true Christian, though he hath not an Assurance of his Salvation.

For the Illustration and Proof hereof, I shall lay down these following Particulars.

First, That an Assurance of Grace and Salvation is not of the Nature and Essence of Faith, but only accompanies a greater Degree thereof. It is given to very few, and perhaps only to such whom God calls forth either to extraordinary Services, or to extraordinary Sufferings. Thus in the

Apostle

Apostles Times, they were called to extraordinary Services, to preach the Gospel both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, to convert the whole World from Superstition and Idolatry, to overcome all their inveterate Prejudices, and to conquer the Kingdom of the Devil, which he had set up for many Ages in the Hearts of Men. And as their Labours were so great; so it was fit that they should have a proportionable Encouragement, and be more absolutely certain, of a future Reward for all their Pains. But our Labours are only in common, to preach the Gospel, which they had planted, and which is established by Law among us, and countenanced and encouraged by the Supreme Authority. And if we were to expect as great an Encouragement as they had, we may as well expect the Speaking of all Sorts of Languages, and the Working of Miracles. Besides, in the Times of Persecution, both among the *primitive Christians*, and in *Queen Mary's* Days, many Professors were called forth to seal to the Truth of their Religion with their Blood, and endure the utmost Torments, which Men and Devils could invent. And who without a Supernatural Assistance could be sufficient for these Things? But we (blessed be God!) are safe from any such Dangers, and therefore may well be content with the common Encouragements. A Child is as much a Man, as he who is grown to his full Bigness; and there are are Babes in Christ, who must be *fed with milk* and proper Nourishment, and cannot digest stronger Meat, or such Doctrines as can only be applied to the most excellent and accomplished Christians. And the Apostle saith to the *Corinthians*, *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.* And he tells the *Hebrews*, that *a strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* And, indeed, to expect such Things in every Christian is the same as if we expected, that a School-Boy should construe the hardest Authors, who is but just entered into the Rules of Grammar; which will serve only to confound and dishearten him, but can no Way turn to any Advantage. Our Saviour tells us, that *the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard-seed, which is the least*

^c 1 Cor. iii. 2.
30, 31, 32.

^d Heb. v. 14.

^e Matt. xiii. 31, 32. Mark iv.

Luke xiii. 18, 19.

least of all seeds ; but when it is grown is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come, and lodge in the branches thereof. And if we have but a small Degree of Faith, as a Grain of Mustard-Seed, if it is not dead, it will be available, even though we perceive not these great Effects in the present World. And thus the Apostle told the *Ephesians*, Chap. i. 13. that they also trusted in Christ, after that they had heard the word of truth, even the gospel of their salvation, and that after they had believed, they were sealed with that holy spirit of promise. So that they were in a State of Grace, they truly believed and trusted in Christ, but it was long after that, before they were sealed with the Spirit of Promise, or had an Assurance of their Salvation. We do not deny, that the Spirit of God doth many Times enable a true Christian to discern those Promises, which God hath given him, and to discern in himself those Graces, to which the Promises of Life are made; and thus *the spirit bears witness with his spirit, that he is the son of God. And if we are children, then are we heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.* But the Condition is, that if we suffer with him, we may hold out to the End, and so be glorified together. And therefore, to expect such a Revelation in all Cases, when we are called forth to no Sufferings, is without a Warrant, it makes his special Gifts too common and cheap, and cannot be reckoned as a Part of Religion, but a grand Enthusiasm.

And therefore, *secondly*, A true Believer may wait long before he hath such an Assurance of his Salvation, or he may never obtain it in this Life. God may not give him any Part of his Reward until his Work is done. Nay, God may hide his Face for Trial of a Christian's Faith and Patience, and many other Graces, which are as necessary as any others. He may also hide his Face to stir us up to many Duties, such as fervent Prayer to him, and a conscientious Reading of the Scriptures, Attending on the Word preached and the Sacraments, in Hope of meeting with God in his own Ordinances. And if so, even his most afflicting Providence may prove in the End to be the greatest Blessing. The *Psalmist* throughout the lxxxviiith *Psalm* makes a grievous Complaint, how his soul was full of trouble, and his life drew nigh unto hell; that God's wrathful displeasure went over him, and his fear

fear had undone him ; they came round about him daily like water, and compassed him together on every side. And yet he calls God, *the Lord God of his salvation*, and cried day and night before him, in Hope of obtaining Comfort, though he had not as yet any Assurance of it. The *Psalmist* also saith, *Psalm cxvi. 10, 11. I believed, and therefore have I spoken, but I was sore afflicted, and I said in my haste, All men are liars.* Now the *Psalmist*, even at that Time, was in a safe Condition ; for the Apostle *St. Paul*, *2 Cor. iv. 13.* applies these very Words to himself. *We having the same Spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken ; we also believe, and therefore speak.* The Prophet *Isaiab*, Chap. l. 10. asks this Question, *Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light ?* So that there may be many who fear the Lord, and are accepted of him, who still walk in Darkness, and have no Light. But what must such a Man do ? Must he look upon himself as in a State of Damnation ? God forbid ! This might bring him into such a State indeed. The Prophet gives him a better Direction. *Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.* He may live in Hope, that all his Troubles shall end with Death, and may be so far assured, that he shall never be left without such a comfortable Support and Assistance of the *Spirit of God*, as shall keep him from sinking into utter Despair.

And, *thirdly*, It is possible, that he who hath such an Assurance of his Salvation, may have it weakened and intermitted by many Distempers, Sins, Temptations, and Deser-tions, and be in as uncomfortable a Condition, as if he never had it. It is well known, that Distempers of the Body have an Influence upon the Mind. Some are light-headed by a Fever, others are distracted by a Disorder of the Brain, and others are ready to despair only through a melancholy Constitution. But shall we think their State to be ever the worse in the Sight of God, or that their Souls shall be accountable for such Distempers of the Body, which it did not lie in their Power either to foresee or prevent ? The best of God's Servants are liable to many Sins. These may leave a Horror of Conscience behind them, which may perplex their Minds, and even almost bring them to Despair, and make them be-

lieve, that their former Confidence was only an ill-grounded Presumption. Besides, all Men are liable to Temptations. The *devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour*, and whom he may perplex, and if he should be permitted to fill the Mind with Doubts and Scruples, there is an End of all this Assurance of Salvation, at least for a Time; and yet their State in the Main may be as good, as it was before. And as such an Assurance is only occasioned by an extraordinary Manifestation of God's Spirit; so God for several wise Reasons best known to himself, may withdraw the Light of his Countenance for a Time, and leave us to ourselves, that we may try, whether the *Sparks, which we have kindled*, can afford us either Light or Heat, when we most want it. In the lxxviiith Psalm, the Psalmist tell us, how his soul refused to be comforted, how he complained, and his spirit was overwhelmed. He said, *Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be no more intreated? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* But then he recollects himself, *And I said, This is my own Infirmary.* His State in the Main was never the worse; but to comfort himself, he would remember the years of the right-hand of the most High; and consider, that the God who did wonders in old times, whose way was in the sea, and his paths in the great waters, and whose footsteps are not known, was able to bring him again out of this melancholy State. The Church of God in the Canticles saith^r, *I sleep, but my heart waketh. It is the voice of my beloved, that saith unto me, Open unto me, my sister, my love, my undefiled.* This is a sufficient Testimony, that she was in a happy Condition; but then it follows, *I opened unto my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone. My soul failed when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him, but he gave me no answer.* And this is a plain Instance, that God may withdraw himself for a Time from such, whom he loves and approves of. Holy David, Psal. xxxi. 22. tells us of a Time, when he said in his haste, *I am cut off from before thine eyes.* But God was still his God, and he adds, *Nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my prayer, when I cried unto thee.* And then he gives a Direction for others, who

^r 1 Pet. v. 8.

^s Cant. v. 2, 6.

are in the same Condition, O love the Lord, all ye his saints, for the Lord rewardeth the faithful. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your hearts, all ye that hope in the Lord. At another Time holy David complains saying, ^h My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? And thus he goes one for several Verses. But though God seemed to forsake him, yet as to his eternal State, he was as safe, as ever he was before. And therefore he adds for our Instruction, ⁱ Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him all ye seed of Israel. For he hath not despised, nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted: Neither hath he hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard him. I may add to this, that our blessed Saviour upon the Cross used these very Words, ^k My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But shall we think that he was in a State of Damnation, because the comfortable Influences of the Godhead were suspended for a Time? This is such a Blasphemy, which is shocking to the Eyes of every Christian, and therefore, I dare not to speak any more of it. Job was a Man ^l, who was perfect and upright, one who feared God, and eschewed evil, and in the midst of his Afflictions he held fast his Integrity. But yet ^m he cursed the Day in which he was born, and used ⁿ many other impatient Expressions, which can only be excused, because God knew the Miseries which he laboured under, and gives great Allowances in all such Cases. So that in the midst of all he pardoned these Infirmities, and testified that ^o his Servant Job had in the main spoken of him the Thing that was right. David ^p was a Man after God's own Heart, even before he was anointed to be King over Israel. But yet we find many Psalms, in which he testified, how much he was afflicted with the Sense of God's Displeasure. How he was weary with his groaning, and all the night he made his bed to swim, and watered his couch with tears. That the hand of God was heavy upon him day and night, and his moisture

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was

^h Psalm xxii. 1 to 19. ⁱ Verse 23, 24. ^k Matt. xxvii. 46. Mark xv. 34. ^l Job i. 1, 8. and Chap. ii. 3. ^m Job iii. ⁿ Chap. vi. 1 to 12. Chap. vii. 13, 14, 15, 16. Chap. x. 1, 2, 3, &c. and Verse 18, 19. Chap. xiii. 3. Chap. xvi. 21. and Chap. xxiii. 2, 3, 4. ^o Job xlii. 7. ^p 1 Sam. xvi. 7. ^q Psalm vi. 6, 7, 8. Psalm xxxii. 3, 4, 5. Psalm xxxviii. 1 to 9, and Verse 15. and Psalm cxlii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

was turned into the drought in summer. That the arrows of God stuck fast in him, and his hand pressed him sore. There was no soundness in his flesh because of God's anger, neither was there any rest in his bones by reason of his sin. That his spirit was overwhelmed within him, and failed him, and his heart within him was desolate. And yet in every one of these Psalms he speaks of his Trust in God's Mercies, his Deliverance out of such a State, or gives us Directions how we should behave ourselves at such a Time, with a Promise of Success. After he had committed Adultery with Bathsheba, and was reproved by Nathan the Prophet, he penned the fifty first Psalm, in which he acknowledgeth ^a his transgressions, and tells us, that his sin was ever in his sight. He prays to God ^b to make him hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which he had broken might rejoice. He testifies that he once had an Assurance of God's Favour, but lost it again: And therefore he prays unto God ^c to restore unto him the joy of his salvation, and uphold him with his free spirit, which is so free, that it may be restrained at any Time, and ^d like the wind, bloweth only where it listeth. Hezekiah ^e not only in the Beginning, but also throughout the whole Course of his Reign, did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. But after this he was afflicted with a dangerous Distemper of Body, which had a great Influence upon his Mind, insomuch that he afterwards confessed, what bitter Lamentations he had. ^f I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter, I did mourn as a dove. My eyes failed with looking upwards, and I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. But yet we find that God was ready to save him in the midst of all, delivered him from all his Fears, and wrought a Miracle for his Comfort and Satisfaction.

Thus we see that an Assurance of our Salvation, is not given to all true Believers, and probably to very few in this Age.

^a 2 Sam. xii. 1 to 13.

^b Verse 3.

^c Verse 8.

^d Verse 12.

^e John iii. 8.

^f 1 Kings xviii. 3, 5, 6.

2 Chron. xxix. 1, 2.

^g Isa.

xxviii. 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, and 20.

Age. A true Christian may wait long before he hath it, and after that may have it clouded and weakened, or be wholly deprived of it. But, shall we reckon such to be in a State of Damnation? God forbid! The Apostle saith, ^a *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye.* Acknowledge that such a Man may be in a State of Grace, and an Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. We should comfort such a Man ^b, *lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow,* and ^c *lest Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices.* And when we receive him in this Manner, we should also beware, that we receive him *not to doubtful disputations*; which was the second Thing proposed to be considered.

These *doubtful Disputations* may relate to controverted Points in Divinity. And they are either in ceremonial Matters, or in fundamental Articles. As for ceremonial Matters, it is absolutely absurd to trouble a weak, poor Christian with them. His Mind is taken up in greater Concerns, wherein he requires Satisfaction. And to perplex him with these things is the ready way to confound him, and not to comfort him. And as to the fundamental Points, which are controverted, they are much better omitted at such a Time. This is ^d *the strong meat, which belongs only to those who are of full age,* and are set apart for the Work of the Ministry, and *who by reason of use and hard Study have their senses exercised to discern what is right and what is wrong.* And, as we never read but once, that God appeared in a thorny Bush, so it is very seldom, that such Controversies do any good; but it is often found, that they do a great deal of Mischief. But, by the *doubtful Disputations* in the Text, seem principally to be meant such Controversies, as will rather serve to increase the Doubts and Scruples of a weak Christian, and rather drive him to Despair, than administer any Comfort. There are many Cases of this Nature, which I have not Time to insist on, and therefore I shall only speak of one, by which we may guess at the rest.

Suppose a Man should tell to weak, and doubting Christians, that they must have an *Assurance of their Salvation*, even by Revelations from God, or else they are in a State of Damnation; and tell of such Revelations, which he himself hath

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had,

^a Rom. xiv. 1.^b 2 Cor. ii. 8.^c 2 Cor. ii. 11.^d Heb. v. 14.

had, as a Pattern for others. Such an Assertion may be attended with the worst of Consequences.

First, It savours very much of a spiritual Pride ; and this, instead of bringing such a Man nearer to Heaven, sets him farther from it. The whole Tenor of the Gospel is to teach us Humility and Lowliness of Mind. The first of all the Beatitudes is, * *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* St. Paul in this Epistle is very plain. 'I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. He further adds, † *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself.* He speaks ironically to the Corinthians, ‡ *We know that we all have knowledge.* But then he tells them the Effects of it. *Knowledge puffeth up ; but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing ; he knoweth nothing that he ought to know. But if any man love God, even the meanest of Christians, the same is known of him.* He saith, that § *charity vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up ; and doth not behave itself in such an unseemly Manner.* When he wrote to ¶ *the Ephesians as the prisoner of the Lord, he besought them, that they would walk worthy of that vocation, wherewith they were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, and thus endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* See how passionate he is in writing to the Philippians on this Subject. 'If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory ; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself. And look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. And so let this mind be in us,

* Matt. v. 3.

† 1 Cor. viii. 1, 2, 3.

‡ Phil. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

¶ Rom. xii. 3, 4, 5, 16.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

¶ Rom. xv. 1, 2, 3.

‡ Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3.

which was also in Christ Jesus. And he tells St. Timothy, that ^a there are novices in the Church of God, of whom there was a great Danger, lest being lifted up with pride, they should fall into the condemnation of the devils, since it was this Sin, which deprived them of that happy State, in which they were created. St. Peter exhorts us, that ^a we should be all clothed with humility. And gives this Reason, For God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble. St. John taxeth the Laodiceans ^o because they said, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knew not, that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and saith, that for this among other Reasons God threatened to spue them out of his mouth. Can we then think that the Pharisee was ever the better, because ^p he said, God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are? No. The Publican, who had no such Assurance, but smote on his breast, saying, Lord be merciful to me a sinner, went home to his house justified, rather than the other. And the Reason is, For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. The Prophet Isaiah tells us of a Set of conceited People in his Time, ^q Who said to others, Stand by thy self, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou. But then he gives them a wretched Character. They were a rebellious people, who walked in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts. A people who provoked him to anger continually before his face. A smoke in his nose, and a fire, that burned all the day; and therefore threatens, that God would not always keep silence, but deal with them according to their Deserts. Such an affected Boasting of divine Revelations is a plain Argument, that none of them came from God; but that rather ^r Satan had transformed himself into an angel of light, and filled them with strong delusions, that they might the more effectually, though they never intended it, enlarge the Kingdom of Darkness.

If it pleased God by his holy Spirit to give me such an Assurance of my Salvation, I should think myself obliged heartily to bless his Name for it in private, and humbly beg the Continuance of it. But I should also think my self obliged

^a 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^a 1 Pet. v. 5, 6.

^o Rev. iii. 16, 17.

^p Luke

xviii. 10 to 15.

^q Isa. lxxv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

^r 2 Cor. xi. 14.

15. 2 Thes. iii. 11, 12.

obliged in Conscience to conceal it, unless I was called forth to Martyrdom. Because, I think, in such Cases as these the *Apostle* saith, *Hast thou faith? Have it to thy self.* This *Apostle* had great *visions and revelations.* He was caught up into the third heavens, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, and there he heard unspeakable words, which it was not possible for a man to utter. But yet he never mentioned it but once, which was, when the *Corinthians* had undervalued him and his Ministry. And then he corrected himself, saying, *I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me.* But we are under no such Necessity in this Age, and therefore should not make ourselves fools. And if we do, we may rather fear, lest, as he forewarns us, the messenger of *satan* should be sent to buffet us, and afflict us with many Temptations, because we exalt ourselves above measure. And, indeed, if I declared others to be in a State of Damnation, who had not arrived to such a Degree, I should fear that God would withdraw the Light of his Countenance, and leave me to be condemned by my own Doctrine. And happy, saith the *Apostle*, is he who condemneth not himself, in that which he alloweth.

Secondly, As it favours so much of Pride, so is it also very uncharitable. Perhaps there is not one Man in this Age, to whom God gives this full Assurance: However, we may affirm, that there is not one in a Thousand, and shall we reckon the nine Hundred Ninety and Nine to be cast away? This will make it a little Flock indeed, to whom God the Father is pleased to give the Kingdom of Heaven. It will make the Blood of Christ to be of very small Effect, since there are so few, who are to reap the Benefit of it. And therefore, we may certainly hope for better Things. It would be a terrible Discouragement to every conscientious Minister to think, that perhaps after all his Pains there might not be one Soul the better for his Preaching. This would make the Word of God to be the *savour of death unto death* to most, and the *savour of life unto life* to very few. This would make the Sacraments to seal up the Condemnation of most who received them, and to be available for the Salvation of an inconsiderable Number. This will strangely limit the Favours of God, and put an unaccountable Construction

on all those Texts where he is represented as "infinite in goodness, as gracious and merciful, and one who forgives iniquities, and transgressions and sins; as * swearing by his life that he desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his evil way and live, and † not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. St. John describes the Church triumphant, that he ‡ beheld, and lo a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues stood before the throne, and before the lamb, cloathed with white robes, and palms in their hands. And that by the doubtful Disputations in the Text are meant such uncharitable, and distinguishing Doctrines as these, is plain from what follows, Verse 4. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth: Yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand.* And Verse 10, &c. *But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every mouth shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give an account of himself before God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no one put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way^a.*

Thirdly, As it is most uncharitable; so if it should spread, it may be the Ruin of many Souls, by bringing them to Despair. When a Christian hath long attended upon God in the Way of his Duty, and is told, that he is still in a State of Damnation, what can be done? He hath done his utmost, he can do no more, and all this is nothing; so that there is still this melancholy Apprehension left, that he is lost, and undone to all Eternity. If we perswade such a Man to pray to God, to read his Word, to join with the Congregation in the publick Exercises of God's Worship, and to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, all this he hath done for many Years; so that he hath tried all the Means mentioned in the Scriptures, and therefore, he must either despair, or find out some other Way to Heaven, beside what is revealed there, which is impossible. And if this is the Case in Time of Health, what

^a Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Psalm lxxxvi. 5. Joel ii. 13. Jonah iv. 2. Ezek. xviii. 32. [†] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [‡] 1 Tim. ii. 4. 2 Pet. iii. 9. Rev. v. 11, and 7, 9. ^{*} See also Matt. vii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

what Comfort can there be in Time of Sickness, or at the Hour of Death, when there are some Duties, that we cannot do at all; and there are none which we can do, as well as we did before, but the Disorders of the Body indispose and disable the Mind, so that we are not capable of Doing any Thing aright? And as they had no Assurance of their Salvation in Time of Health; so it cannot be expected in Time of Sickness. And if the Friends or Relations of such Persons deceased, did believe it to be true, it is the most uncomfortable Doctrine, that can be preached. And therefore, as such a Notion hath so strong a Tendency to shake our Faith, and drive us to Despair, therefore we ought, as we hope for Salvation, to beware how we do receive it.

Fourthly, As it may be of ill Consequence to others; so it may be as bad to those, who endeavour to propagate such Notions. If *they who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever*; what must be the Case of those, who by advancing such Doctrines shall drive many to Despair? It is contrary to the Example of *Christ Jesus*, whose Character it was, that as *a good and faithful Shepherd he should feed his flock; he should gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and should gently lead those which are with young*. And of whom it is said, that *he should not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, until he should send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name should the Gentiles trust*. For this Reason the Apostle, in the Chapter out of which I have taken the Text, makes this Inference from thence; *Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no one put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. And if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, or with such spiritual Food, which thou pretendest to give him, thou walkest not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of. And in the Epistle to the Corinthians, he gives a Caution, lest through our knowledge the weak brother should perish, for whom Christ died. And he adds this Reason, But when ye sin thus against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ. And our blessed Saviour himself, as he is recorded by three Evan-*

^b Dan. xii. 3.
15, 16.

^c Isa. xl. 11.
^f 1 Cor. viii. 11, 12.

^d Matt. xii. 20.

^e Verse 13.

gelsists, saith, ^a *Wo unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but wo unto the man by whom the offence cometh. And whoso shall offend one of these little ones, who believe in me, it were better for him, that a milstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the midst of the sea.* If then there are no Texts of Scripture to warrant such uncharitable notions, as I think there are not, they who advance them, ought to take an especial Care, and retract in due Time, lest they should be accountable before God for the Consequences of them. I shall further add, that it may be a dangerous Snare to those, who entertain such wild, enthusiastick Notions, that they are assured of their Salvation, and have had such extraordinary Revelations of this Nature. Suppose such a Man should fall into any grievous Sin, and by this Means such an Assurance should be taken from him, how can he himself without Horror think of such Texts of Scripture as that of St. Paul? ^b *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.* Such an Instance may be a terrible Disgrace to Christianity, and undermine even the very Foundation. And therefore such a Doctrine, like a two-edged Sword, may wound as well him, who thinks he hath such an Assurance, as him who thinks that he hath it not.

How much better therefore is it to comfort and strengthen weak, and doubting Christians, with such Promises which God hath recorded in his holy Word, than to give them such strong Meat, which they are not able to digest? I shall briefly mention a few out of many; The Prophet *Isaiab* saith, ⁱ *Who is there among you, that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.* And in another Place, ^k *He giveth power to the faint, and to them who have no might he increaseth strength. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary,*

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^a Matt. xviii. 6, 7. Mark ix. 42. Luke xvii. 1, 2.
ⁱ Isa. l. 10. ^k Isa. xl. 29, 30, 31.

^b Heb. vi. 4,

weary, they shall walk and not faint. And ¹ Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the Heart of the contrite ones. And again ^m to the same Purpose, All things hath the hand of God made, and all these things have been, saith the Lord; but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word. Holy David saith, ^a The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, and speaking to God he immediately adds, *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* And he more than once comforts himself in this Manner, ^o *Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul? And why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.* And above all, Christ himself invites such poor Christians in a most affectionate Manner; saying, ^p *Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Let us therefore receive, cherish and embrace all such weak, and doubting Christians, and comfort them with the gracious Promises, which God hath given them, and beware that we fill not their Heads with such doubtful disputations, as can only tend to drive them to despair.

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

^m Isa. lxvi. 2.

^a Psalm li. 17.

^o Psalm

xlii. 5, 11, and Psalm xliii. 5.

^p Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30.

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APPENDIX.

THE Design of this *Appendix* is to answer those Objections, which either have, or may be brought from several Texts of *Scripture*, by those who have of late asserted, that they, who are not assured of their Salvation by a Revelation from the *Holy Ghost*, are in a State of Damnation.

The first Text of *Scripture*, where I find *Assurance* mentioned, is, *Isa. xxxii. 15, 17. Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high; then the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*

But he, who begins to read at the ninth Verse, may plainly see, that there the *Prophet* speaks of the sad spiritual State of the *Jews*, until the Inspiration of the *Apostles* at the Day of *Pentecost*, and the glorious State of the Gospel, which should follow. Thus *St. Peter, Acts ii. 16 to 22*, applies the Prophecy of *Joel, Chap. ii. 28. to the end*, to the same Time, and therefore we need not to extend it any farther. However, let us suppose, that it is a Promise to all *Christians* to the End of the World; yet, it can only signify the common Assistances of God's holy Spirit, which perhaps every true *Christian* feels more or less in the Use of Means, in the Discharge of his Duty, in the Examination of his past Life and Conversation, and in Applying the Promises to himself. Like to this, is that of *St. Paul, Rom. v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Being justified by faith, not by any immediate Revelation, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein ye stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God: And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.* So

that the *Holy Ghost* is only given by the Use of Means, and the Exercise of our Graces, and not by an extraordinary Effusion, unless we are called forth to extraordinary *Tribulations*. And the same Apostle saith also, 2 Cor. i. 12. *Our rejoicing is this, not an extraordinary Revelation, but the common testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more especially to you-wards.* And, that the Prophet speaks in the same Manner, is evident from his own Words. For, though he speaks of the *Pouring out of the Spirit from on high*; yet he doth not say, that this *Assurance* shall be the Effect of its being poured forth: But that in a common Way *the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance for ever*, which we all know and thankfully experience.

The next Text, which speaks of an Assurance, is, Col. ii. 2. where St. Paul expresth the great Conflict, which he had for the *Colossians*, that *their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding.* But here he speaks only of a firm Belief of the fundamental Doctrines of Christianity, which is in every true Christian, and the Effect of it, which is a ready Confession of our Faith before Men, when we are called to it, for the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father and of Christ. *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* This is like what he saith to Timothy, 2 Ep. iii. 14, 15. *Continue thou in the things, which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, which was from the Apostles Preaching, and because from a child he had known the holy scriptures, which alone are able to make a man wise unto salvation by faith, which is in Christ Jesus.* So that this Assurance of Understanding is only what we have by the Use of Means, particularly by the Reading and Preaching of the Word of God, and not from any immediate Revelation.

The next Text is, Heb. vi. 11, 12. *We desire, that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end. That ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* But to this it may be answered, that the Assurance of Hope, and the Assurance

Assurance of Certainty are two very different Things, and the *Apostle* speaks of the first of these, and not of the latter, or to speak in other Terms, A full *Assurance* that we may be saved, so as to exclude all Despair; but not a full *Assurance* that we shall be saved, which may be a great Presumption. Hope is an Expectation of some good Thing to come, of which we have no Certainty. Thus the *Apostle* describes it, Rom. viii. 24, 25. *We are saved by hope: But hope, that is seen, is not hope: For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for it? But if we hope for what we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.* And if we are fully assured, there is not so great a Necessity of waiting with Patience. And this he tells us, in the foregoing Verse, was his own Case, and the Case of other real *Christians*. *We our selves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we our selves groan within our selves, waiting for the adoption.* But let this *Assurance of Hope* be what it will, the *Apostle* tells us in the same Text, that it is obtained by good Works, and labour of love, and by Diligence in our Duties unto the End, that we may not be slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherited the promises. This Faith, as he describes it, Heb. xi. 1. is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen; and therefore, it must be a great Straining of the Text, and contrary to his Intention, to apply it to such things as are seen by an immediate Revelation.

The next Text is, Heb. x. 22. *Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.* To this I answer, that an *Assurance of Faith*, and an *Assurance of Certainty*, are two very different Things. And he who hath the first of these may draw nigh to God in any Ordinance. This Distinction St. Paul allows of, 2 Cor. v. 7. where speaking of himself, the rest of the *Apostles*, and the *Christians* in his Time, he saith, *We walk by faith, and not by sight.* The *Assurance of Faith* was very common; but the *Assurance of Certainty*, or by Revelations, was very seldom; and only given in extraordinary Cases. The *Assurance of Faith* is, when we fully believe, that we are lost and undone by Nature, and must utterly perish in that Condition; when we are fully assured, that the Death of *Christ* is a sufficient Satisfaction for all our sins, and his Merits imputed to us, will make us perfectly holy in the Sight of God the Father; both these are of infinite

nite Value, because he was *God*, and may be applied to us as he was *Man* and our Mediator ; and this makes us receive and apply all this to ourselves, and rely and depend on this alone, hoping that thereby we shall obtain the Promises, which are given in general Terms to all that believe, and endeavouring to perform the Conditions required on our Parts. This is sufficient to bring us to Heaven, though we never have an Assurance of Certainty as to our particular Case. I shall explain this by a Similitude, which is easy to be applied. Suppose a Ship is cast away, and another is ready at hand to save the Passengers ; there is no Possibility to escape being drowned, but by getting into the other. One Man gets into the Ship, who from long Experience in Navigation knows that the Storm will cease, and is so well acquainted with the Firmness of this Ship, that he is fully assured, he shall get safe to Land. Another gets into the same, who hath indeed some Hope, and knows that this is his only Refuge, but he is still frightened and terrified, and cannot tell what to do. Now the same Ship brings both equally safe to Shore : And the only Difference is, that the one hath more Comfort than the other, until they are landed. And thus the *Assurance of Faith* is sufficient, though we have no *Assurance of Certainty* until we come to Heaven.

However, Let us take such Texts as these in the strictest Sense that possibly we can ; yet even in such a Case they will only signify what we should endeavour after, not what we can obtain. Thus, *Lev. xi. 44, and xix. 2, and xx. 7, and 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.* we are commanded to *be holy*, as *God is holy*. *Luke vi. 36.* we are commanded to *be merciful*, as our *Father also is merciful* ; and *Matt. v. 48.* to *be perfect*, even as our *Father, which is in heaven, is perfect*. All this is absolutely impossible in this imperfect State ; but the Reason of the Commands is this, that we may endeavour to come as near it, as possibly we can, and the nearer we come to it, the greater will be our Comfort here, and our Reward hereafter.

Other Arguments to prove this Doctrine are taken out of the *Acts of the Apostles*, where it is said, *Acts viii. 15, 16, 17, and xix. 2, 5, 6.* that the *Apostles* prayed for the primitive *Christians*, laid their hands, and they received the Holy Ghost. This can only relate to the Office of Confirmation in our Church, which is foreign to the present Dispute, since no

one in this Age, but the Bishops, lay Hands on others for this Purpose. The Promise, *Acts* i. 5, 8. can be applied only to the *Apostles* on the Day of *Pentecost*, when, *Chap.* ii. 2, 3, 4. there came suddenly a sound from heaven, as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled all the house, where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. But, I hope, no one pretends to this, unless he can shew such miraculous Instances. Thus, *Acts* iv. 31. the Assembly were all filled with the holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. But here was also a Miracle, for when they had prayed, the place was shaken, where they were assembled together. Thus, *Acts* ix. 17. Ananias was sent to St. Paul, that he might be filled with the holy Ghost. But here were also two Miracles, St. Paul had been before stricken with Blindness, as he went to *Damascus*, he continued so three Days, and now he was restored to his Sight. When St. Peter preached to *Cornelius*, *Acts* iv. 44, 45, 46, 47. The holy Ghost fell on all them, who heard the word. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the holy Ghost, as well as we? Of this St. Peter tells us, *Acts* xi. 15, 16, 17. As I began to speak, the holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning, *Chap.* ii. 4. in a miraculous Manner, attested by a visible Sign. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the holy Ghost, *Acts* i. 5. Thus he also saith, *Acts* xv. 8, 9. God, who knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the holy Ghost, even as he did unto us, And put no difference between us and them. Upon this Occasion, *Acts* x. 45, 46. They of the circumcision, who believed, were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the Gift of the holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Now if the holy Ghost came in a visible Manner, or if they, who pretend to receive it, spoke such Languages on a sudden, as they had never learned; it would be a strong Argument on their Side; but still then, we may rather conclude it to be a strong Delusion. The other Texts in the *Acts* are these, *Acts* ii. 38. Repent therefore, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Ghost. *Acts v. 32.* We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. And, *Chap. ix. 31.* Then had the churches rest, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the holy Ghost, were multiplied. And, *Acts xiii. 52.* And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the holy Ghost. But here is nothing in these Texts, but what may signify only the common Gifts and Graces, which the Holy Ghost is pleased to give to every Christian. Or, if we will strain the Text to signify something extraordinary, it may be considered, that at the first Conversion to Christianity, when the new Converts could have no temporal Encouragement even from Friends or Relations, *Luke xxi. 16, 17.* and were exposed to the Rage and Malice both of Jews and Gentiles, there was an extraordinary Occasion for it. And as these Things happened, when Miracles were very common; so it is absurd to apply them to this Age, in which Miracles are ceased.

The next Text is, *Rom. viii. 16, 17.* The Spirit it self beareth witness with our spirit, that ye are the children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. But the Condition, by which we are intitled to this Promise, is, *if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.* If we are called forth to extraordinary Sufferings, which, blessed be God, is the Case of none of us, then we may expect an extraordinary Comfort. Accordingly this Spirit, *Verse 15.* is called, *not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* He therefore, who is so far in Bondage, as to be afraid of Persecutions, or Death for the Sake of the Gospel, cannot well lay Claim to such an extraordinary Promise. And I doubt, that this is the Case of very few in this Age: For *who* can say, that he is sufficient for these things?

Another Text is, *Acts xi. 24.* Where it is said of Barnabas, that he was a good Man, and full of the holy Ghost and of faith. He was an extraordinary Person, and probably one of the seventy Disciples. He shewed an extraordinary Zeal in the early Times of Christianity. For, *Acts iv. 36, 37.* he whose Name being interpreted the son of consolation, Having land sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles feet, to be distributed among the poor Converts. He

was the first, who introduced St. Paul to the *Apostles* after his Conversion; *Acts* ix. 27. and was sent by them to strengthen the *Christians* at *Antioch*, *Acts* xi. 22, 23. He was the Companion of St. Paul in that City, and took Part of his Labours, *Acts* ix. 25, 26. and was sent with him to bring Relief to the Brethren in *Judea*; and *Acts* xiii. 2, 3. was by an express Order of the *Holy Ghost* separated to be with St. Paul in *Seleucia*, *Cyprus*, and *Salamis*, in *Paphos*, *Perga*, and *Antioch*, *Acts* xiii. 4, 5, 13, 14. in *Iconium*, *Lystra*, and *Derbe*, *Acts* xiv. 1, 6. and in other Places, *Acts* xiv. 24, &c. and when they came to *Jerusalem*, they, *Acts* xv. 12. declared to all the *Apostles*, and the whole Multitude, what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them; and all the *Apostles* gave him this Character, *Acts* xv. 26. that he was a Man, who had hazarded his life for the name of the Lord *Jesus*. And if he had extraordinary Assistances from the *Holy Ghost*, there is no Reason for others to expect the same in very different Circumstances.

The next Text is, 1 *Cor.* ii. 10, 11, 12, 13. God hath revealed unto us the good things, which he hath prepared for them that love him, by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man, which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things, which are freely given us of God. Which things we also speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. It may be a sufficient Answer to this Text to say, that it speaks only of the Inspiration of the *Apostles* at the Day of *Pentecost*, and the extraordinary Revelations, which St. Paul had at his Conversion, and after that, 2 *Cor.* xii. 1, 2, 3, 4. when he was caught up to the third heavens, and heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful, or possible for a man to utter. And that the Word *we*, which he so often useth, refers only to him and them. But if we take it in a larger Sense, I think, that it may be clearly expounded in the following Manner. 'Holy Men of God penned the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as they were guided by the Holy Ghost; 2 *Pet.* i. 21. who hath revealed to us thereby

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the

‘ the happy State of those, who shall inherit the Kingdom
 ‘ of Heaven, and the Means whereby we shall obtain it,
 ‘ and hath brought Life and Immortality to Light by the
 ‘ Gospel, 2 *Tim.* i. 10. This Spirit, being one of and the
 ‘ same Substance with the Father, searcheth into all the secret
 ‘ Counsels of his Will, and reveals to us, as much as is
 ‘ fit for us to know. For as the Soul of a Man knows all
 ‘ things, which relate to Man; so the *Holy Ghost* knows
 ‘ all things which relate to God. And the Apostles re-
 ‘ ceived particular Assistances from him, to know, and preach
 ‘ those things from his divine Inspirations and Writings, not
 ‘ decked with human Eloquence, but powerful in its spiritual
 ‘ Simplicity. And as the Doctrine is spiritual, so they pro-
 ‘ pounded it not with worldly, but with spiritual Words.
 ‘ And he also assists every Christian in the diligent Use of the
 ‘ holy Scriptures, to know so much from them, as shall be
 ‘ sufficient to bring him to Heaven.’ And this is the full
 Meaning of these Words, which ought not to be wrested
 any farther.)

The next Text is, 2 *Cor.* v. 5. *God hath also given unto us
 the earnest of his Spirit.* That is, he hath given us by his
Spirit his holy Word to shew us the Way to Heaven. He
 hath given us his Sacraments as a Pledge to assure us of our
 Title to it. And, he gives every Christian some common
 Assistances and Comforts in the Discharge of his Duty. But
 that no extraordinary Revelations or Assurances are meant by
 these Words, is plain from what follows, *Verse 7.* *For we
 walk by faith, and not by sight.* We believe these things to
 be true; and this is sufficient, for, *John* xx. 29. *Blessed are
 they who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

The next Text is, 2 *Cor.* xiii. 5. *Examine your selves, whe-
 ther ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: Know you not
 your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be
 reprobates?* Here the *Apostle* speaks of such a Knowledge,
 as is obtained by Examination and Trial, and not by imme-
 diate Inspiration. Every Christian ought to be well ac-
 quainted with the State and Condition of his own Heart.
 And if he finds, that he is *in the faith*, that is, if he be-
 lieves *Christ Jesus* to be the Saviour of the World, and the
 true *Messiah*, this is sufficient to shew, that he is a Member
 of the *Christian Church*, and not in a reprobate or pagan
 State.

State. That this is the Meaning of the Word, is evident from the following Verse, *But I trust, that ye shall know, that we are not reprobates.* What did it signify to the Christians to know whether St. Paul was saved, or damned? They were only exhorted to *examine* themselves, and not inquire into the State of others. But it concerned them to know, whether he was a true Preacher of the Gospel, or an Impostor, in Opposition to those, who reproached him and his Ministry, and put him upon a Necessity to vindicate himself, as he did, *Chap. x, xi, xii.* And, as by a *Reprobate* can only be meant a Professor of false Religion, *Verse 6.* so it must be taken in the same Sense, *Verse 5.* already mentioned.

The next Text is, *1 Thes. i. 4, 5, 6. Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.* Here the Apostle speaks not of what they knew of themselves, but what he knew of them, which was their Election of God, that he had called them to be Members of the true Christian Church, though he could not know their Hearts. And he gives this Reason for this Interpretation, *For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the holy Ghost, being endued with extraordinary Qualifications to preach it as an Apostle, and in much Assurance,* or Confidence that what he preached was true, *as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the holy Ghost.* An Account of which Affliction we have, *Acts xvii. 1 to 12.* So that this extraordinary Joy was given in an extraordinary Case; and a common Degree thereof can only be expected in common Cases.

The next Text is, *2 Pet. i. 10. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* This, like other Texts, which speak of a great Perfection, may be interpreted, as an Exhortation to what we should aim at, not to what we can obtain. Or the Sense may be the same with other Texts, as, *Pbil. ii. 12. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;* or with what the same Apostle saith, *1 Epist. iii. 15. Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope, which is in you, with meekness and fear.* And it may be observed, that there is no Promise after the Text of a full Assurance in this

Life; but first, that they shall not fall away into a final Apostasy. *Verse 10.* For if ye do these things ye shall never fall; and of being Inheritors hereafter of the Kingdom of Heaven. *Verse 11.* For so an entrance shall be ministred to you abundantly, not into any temporal Promise mentioned in this Place, but into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Or in other Words, the giving Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure, by the Increasing our Graces and Adding more to them, as in *Verse 5, 6, 7, 8.* is the surest Way to make us obtain the Promises, *Verse 4,* and at last to be Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are many Texts in the first Epistle of St. John, which have been strained to this Purpose. The first is, *1 John ii. 3.* We do know, that we know him. But this is easily answer'd: Our Faith and Interest in God is known, not by any immediate Inspiration, but by an exemplary Life and Conversation. Thus St. James, *Chap. ii. 14.* to the end, fully proves, that our Faith is known by its Works, and is dead without it. And if we take several Verses of St. John together, and not a little Scrap by itself separated from all the rest, we shall plainly find, that it can admit of no other Construction. *Hereby we do know, that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby we know, that we are in him. He that saith, he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk, even as he walked.*

The next Text is, *1 John ii. 20, 27.* Ye have an unction from the holy one. And the anointing, which ye have received of him, abideth in you. But first, Let the Meaning of these Texts be what they will, yet I take it, that they cannot signify any immediate Revelations from the Holy Ghost, even to the Christians then, much less to Christians now. Because such a Notion would make Way for the worst of Heresies.

Because the Holy Ghost is omniscient, hence it would follow, that every Christian is omniscient also. And this would be inferred from these Words. *But ye have an unction from the holy One, and ye know all things.* Because the Holy Ghost teacheth us, therefore we may lay aside Hearing the Word of

of God preached in publick, and all Manner of Instructions in private. This also would be inferred from these Words. *But the anointing, which ye have received of him, abideth in you; and ye need not, that any man teach you.* And because the Holy Ghost is infallible, therefore every Christian, whom he thus teaches, must be infallible also; and then we shall have as many Popes, as there are Persons, who pretend to this Assurance. This may also be inferred from the same Text, if it is interpreted after the same Manner. *But as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie: And even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.* We are therefore to find out another Interpretation of these Words, for which Purpose let it be considered, that as the Words *Messiah* or *Christ* signifies the Anointed; so when the primitive Converts, *Acts xi. 26. were first called Christians at Antioch*, they looked upon themselves as *Anointed* by their Profession; meaning this, that as the Wrestlers, and others in the Olympick Games were anointed, that they might act their Parts the better in their several Combats, so *Christians* were set apart by their Profession, the better to fight against the Devil and all his Work, and to continue *Christ's* faithful Soldiers and Servants unto their Lives End. This occasioned that antient Interpretation of *Psalms cv. 15. Touch not mine anointed*, thus, *Touch not my Christs or Christians.* And therefore, these Words, *The anointing, which ye have received*, may very well be interpreted thus: The Christian Religion, which ye have embraced, and into which ye were baptized. For the Proof of this it must be considered, that the Design of *St. John* in this whole Epistle is to confirm and establish the *Christian Religion*, in Opposition to the Pagan Superstition and Idolatry, and the many Errors, which were even then sprung up concerning the Nature of *Christ*, some denying his Divinity, as ^b the *Ebionites* and the *Cerinthians*, and others denying his Humanity, as ^c the *Gnosticks* and the *Valentinians*. Accordingly in the very Beginning of his Epistle, *Verse 1, 2, 3, 4*, he confirms the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have*

looked

^a Eusebius de *Demonstratione Evangelicâ*, lib. i. cap. v. p. 9, &c.

^b Irenæus adversus *Hæreses*. Et Euseb. *Eccles. Hist.* lib. iii. cap. 27.

^c Irenæus adversus *Hæreses*. Et Tertullian de *carne Christi*.

looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life. (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.) That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. Thus also, Chap. ii. 7, 8. Brethren, I write no new Commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; the old commandment is the word, which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, a clearer Revelation of what was antiently delivered, which thing is true in him and in you, because the darknes of Superstition and Ignorance is now past, and the true light of the Gospel now shineth. And, Verse 13, 14. I write unto you, because ye have overcome the wicked one, even the Devil, who ruled in the Gentile World. And, Verse 18, 19. Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard, that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many Antichrists, some denying the Divinity, and others the Humanity of Christ Jesus, and so opposing the true Doctrines, which relate to him; whereby we know, that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for, if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us. And then follows the Text, which hath been perverted. But ye have an unction from the holy One, you profess the true Christian Religion, into which ye were baptized, contained in the Scriptures, which were written by the Holy Ghost, whereby ye may know all things, which are necessary to be known and believed, and which alone are able to make you wise unto salvation by faith, which is in Christ Jesus. After this he goes on in the same Manner, Verse 21, &c. I have not written unto you, because ye know not the truth, even the Christian Religion, but because ye know it; and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth, that Jesus is the Christ? As the Jews and Gentiles did. He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Let that Christian Religion therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard

from the beginning, shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father. These things have I written unto you, concerning those that seduce you into the Heresies of those Times before mentioned. And then follows the controverted Text. *But the Anointing, the Religion, which you have been taught from Men inspired by the Holy Ghost, and by which ye are called Christians or Anointed, which ye have received of Christ, abideth in you.* You are still Christians; and, ye need not that any man teach you. The Scriptures, which alone reveal these Things, are sufficient. *But as the same anointing or Religion teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in it, and not be carried away by the Errors of the Times. And now, little children, abide in it. That when Christ shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.* Thus we see, that this Interpretation is agreeable to the whole Design of St. John in this Epistle. And therefore, the Forcing the Text to signify any immediate Revelation is without any Authority.

The other Texts therefore in this Epistle may be more easily explained, as Chap. iii. 14. *We know, that we are passed from death unto life.* But we know this not from any immediate Revelation, but as it follows in the next Words, *because we love the brethren.* Our Faith is known by its Works, and *He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death.*

Like to this is what we read, Verse 19. *We know, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.* But how do we know this? Not from any inward Revelation; but, as was before observed, by the Effects of our Faith, and particularly by our Love to our fellow Christians; as appears, if we take the whole Sentence together, Verse 18. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. But if our hearts condemn us not, if we find, that we have endeavoured to keep a Conscience void of Offence, then have we confidence toward God without any other Revelation.*

The next Text is Chap. iii. 24. *Hereby we know, that he abideth in us, by the Spirit, which he hath given us.* But this may be answered from the same and the foregoing Verse. *This*

This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us a commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in him, and he in him: And hereby know we, that he abideth in us, by his Spirit which he hath given us. If then we find, that we have a true Faith in Jesus Christ, and that this Faith stirs us up to discharge our several Duties, hereby we may know, without any immediate Revelation, that it is the Work of the Holy Spirit: But if we find no such Effects, we can have no Assurance, and what we think to be great Revelations, may be but strong Delusions.

The next Text is Chap. iv. 13. Hereby know we, that we believe in him, because he hath given us of his Spirit. Here also this Spirit is known by its Fruits. No man hath seen God at any time. These Revelations are not to be expected. We have another Rule to try ourselves by. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. And we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess, that Jesus is the Son of God, who owns his Divinity, and Humanity, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. This is the only Sign of the Spirit being given unto us, which can be depended on. And then follows another Text, Verse 16. We the Apostles, who have seen and do testify this, as before, Chap. i. 1, 2. have known, and believed the love, which God hath unto us. We know and believe the Promises, which God hath given us through Christ Jesus in the Gospel; how that, as he saith, John iii. 16. and in this Epistle, Chap. iv. 9, 10. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And all this we have fully known and believed from the Scriptures of the New Testament, and have not the least need of any other Revelation to confirm it to us.

The next Text is, 1 John v. 13. These things have I written unto you, that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. But how do we know this? Not from any immediate Revelation, but from those Things which the Apostles have written. This, Verse 11, 12, is the record, that

that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life. From such Promises as these we may try ourselves, whether or no we are Heirs of Salvation, and have no Reason to expect any other Method.

The last Text is 1 John v. 18. *We know that we are of God.* The Meaning of this Text is only this. We know, that we have embraced the true Christian Religion, or the Gospel, which Christ Jesus the Son of God came down from Heaven to publish, and after his Ascension he divinely inspired his Apostles, that they might also preach the same. This is plain from Verse 16. where the Apostle saith, *There is a sin unto death, I do not say, that he shall pray for it.* This Sin unto Death was a Revolting from Christianity to Pagan Idolatry, and was the most heinous that could be committed. And to prevent it, there is this Caution given, Verse 21. *Little children, keep your selves from idols.* He also tells us, Verse 18, 19. *We know, that whosoever is born of God sinneth not in such a dreadful Manner; but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one the Devil toucheth him not, or hath no Power over him to make him revolt to that Religion, where he eminently reigned. And we know that we are of God, we are Christians, we profess the true Religion, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.* The Greek is *ἡ τῷ πονηρῷ κείτται*, lies under the Power of the Devil. We are Christians; all the others, who have not received the Gospel, or have heard of the true God, are Pagans. And, as Verse 20. *we know that the Son of God is come, that Christ Jesus is the true Messiah, and hath given us an understanding by the Preaching of the Gospel, that we may know him that is true. And we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.* We are Christians, they are Heathens. Christ is the true God, and eternal life. They are without hope, being without God in the World. So that to interpret this Text, *We know that we are of God*, to be meant of an inward Revelation, favours either of great Ignorance, or great Perverseness, or rather a Compound of both.

But if there were no other Arguments to confute this Notion, the *Stubble* alone, which is built upon it, is sufficient. Some have been so bold, as to assert, that this Assurance (so absolutely necessary to Salvation, that he who hath it not, is

in a State of Damnation) is given in an Instant, so that every one, who hath it, may remember the Day and Hour of his Conversion. This is shocking to Millions of Souls, who can remember no such Thing. And as the *Apostles*, *Acts* viii. 15, 17. *prayed for the Christians, that they might receive the Holy Ghost*, and they received it accordingly; so some have prayed in private Families, for such Illuminations, and have been so bold, as to ask those who joined with them, if they have received any such at that Time. Some few have dared to affirm, that we have no Christian Church in these Kingdoms, because we do not own the Doctrine of *Assurance*, in the same Manner, as they state it; and that our *blessed Saviour* hath no Church in *Europe*, but in *Moravia*, for the same Reason. And there have been some others, who have affirmed, that they who have this Assurance are in a sinless State. And they ground it upon the Words of *St. John*, 1 *Epist.* iii. 9. *Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* And, 1 *Epist.* v. 18. *We know, that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* To this it may be answered, that *St. John* himself, *Chap.* i. 8, 9, 10. saith, *If we say, that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and the truth is not in us.* Now we must not interpret one of these Texts so, as to contradict the other. If then they had affirmed, that a true *Christian* may fall into great Sins, but not into such as are inconsistent with a State of Grace. Or, he may fall foully, but not finally; for *God* by his Assistance will raise him up again, and recover him out of it. Or, that a true *Christian* may be guilty of Sins of Infirmity but not of Presumption, I should not oppose it. But the true Answer is this; He, who was brought over to be a *Christian* from clear Conviction, and hath professed the same Faith from sincere Motives; though he may fall into many other Sins; yet he shall be so preserved by the Assistance of *God's* Grace, as that he shall not fall away into final Idolatry, or Apostasy.

The Sum of all is this: It is the general Opinion of our Protestant Divines, that such, who truly believe in *Christ Jesus*, and endeavour to walk in all good Conscience before him, may, without an extraordinary Revelation, by Faith grounded upon the Truth of *God's Promises*, and by the *Spirit* enabling them to discern in themselves those Graces, to which the Promises of Life are made, and bearing Witness with their Spirits that they are the Children of *God*, be infallibly assured, that they are in a State of Grace, and shall persevere therein unto Salvation. But then they affirm, that this Assurance is given but to very few, and particularly to those, whom *God* calls forth to extraordinary Services, or to extraordinary Sufferings, or who have been a long Time in a very doubting Case, occasioned by some great Temptations or Desertions. Neither do we deny, but as the Operations of the *Holy Ghost* are free; so he may give it to others, as he pleases. And if it had been urged no farther, there would have been no Controversy about it. But, as this Assurance of Grace and Salvation is not of the Nature and Essence of Faith, but only accompanies a greater Degree of it; therefore, to affirm, that they, who have not such an Assurance of their Salvation, are in a State of Damnation, is a dangerous Error, it savours of a spiritual Pride, Enthusiasm and Uncharitableness; it may drive Thousands of Souls to Despair, it may involve those who propagate it in a heavy Guilt, by laying Stumbling-blocks before weak Christians; and if they who think they have it, should happen to lose it, it may fill their Souls with a greater Terror, than if they never thought that they had it. This new Doctrine therefore ought to be guarded against; it is grounded on no Text of *Scripture*, but only by Taking a short Sentence here and there, without considering the Coherence of what went before, and what follows after. It is only begun by some young giddy Brains, who would fain set themselves up to be the Head of a Party, and so take up with a crude and indigested Notion, and never consider the dismal Consequences of it. It limits that most excellent Attribute of *God*, whose Mercy is over all his works, and hath so often declared himself to be gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth of the evil, Keeping mercy for thousands and forgiving iniquities, transgressions and sins. And thus by dividing *Scripture* from

Scripture, they might by the same Way of Arguing bring in another Error, and say, *That there is no God*, from *Psalm v. 4,* and *xiv. 1.* Such Men as these, are they, whom *St. Paul* describes, *1 Tim. ii. 5, 6, 7.* Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. From which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling, Desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. And, *1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5.* If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and to the doctrine, which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth.

To put this Controversy into as clear a Light as I can, I shall only add, that there is a *Faith of Adherence*, and a *Faith of Assurance*. The *Faith of Adherence* is a saving Grace, wrought in the Heart of a Sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he being convinced of his Sin and Misery, and of the Disability in himself, and all other Creatures to recover him out of his lost Condition, not only assenteth to the Truth of the Promise of the Gospel, but receives and rests on the Death and Righteousness of *Christ Jesus*, therein held forth for Pardon of Sin, and for the Accepting and Accounting of his Person as righteous in the Sight of God. And thus he hopes, though he hath no Certainty. The *Faith of Assurance* is that, whereby a Man absolutely knows all this to be true, as to his own particular Case. So that the *Faith of Adherence* is general, but the *Faith of Assurance* is only particular. Now this *Faith of Adherence* alone is sufficient to bring a Man to Heaven; because, the Promises are given in general to every one who believes, such as, *Mark xvi. 16. John i. 12. John iii. 14, 15, 16, 17, 36. Acts xiii. 38, 39. Acts xvi. 31. Rom. iii. 8, 9, 22. Heb. x. 38. Heb. xi. 39, 40, &c.* And therefore, to limit Salvation to a particular Degree of Faith, is to destroy all those Promises, on which Thousands of Christians have hitherto depended for their eternal Comfort. From which Uncharitableness, false Doctrine and Heresy, Good Lord, deliver us.

Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them, who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they, who are such, serve not the Lord Jesus Christ; but by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

1 Theff. v. 14.

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5.

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth: From such withdraw thy self.

2 Tim. iii. 1 to 8.

From such turn away. For of this sort are they, who creep into houses, and lead captive silly Persons, led away with divers lusts, lusting after Novelties, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

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